OPEN LETTERS.

The Manchester group of botanists.

A PHOTOGRAPH of twenty-five botanists was shown at the Indianapolis meeting of the A. A. A. S. and a number of persons expressed a desire to obtain copies of it. As an accommodation to those who may wish a copy, I will send an order to the photographer for as many as are wanted, and distribute them upon their arrival.

The group was taken at Manchester, England; in 1886, and was the company who gathered at the hospitable home of Prof. Williamson to do honor to the visit of Dr. Asa Gray. All departments of botanical science were represented. The group embraces: Messrs. McNab, Jessen, Treub, Solms-Laubach, Weissmann, Saporta, Baker, Lankester, D'Arcy Thompson, Dyer, Cohn, De Bary, Williamson, Asa Gray, Pringsheim, Carruthers, Gardiner, Oliver, Vines, Marshall Ward, C. Bailey, Balfour, Bower, Potter and Vaizey. The picture is 10 by 12 inches, and an excellent portrait of each individual. The price will be $1.35 unmounted or $1.75 mounted on a neat card 14 by 16 inches and the names written underneath. Those wishing copies will please send in their names as early as possible.— J. C. ARTHUR, *La Fayette, Ind.*

Monomialism.

I like the tone of the editorial in the May GAZETTE upon nomenclature. The propagators of this new fashion of naming plants are so confident of suceess and have so often predicted that the whole botanical world must make unconditional surrender, that I hasten to express my own feeling in the matter before my guns are spiked and my arms confiscated.

I suppose that the object of a name is to afford some ready and tolerably permanent means of designating a particular plant. And we have always been taught that it is no part of any system of nomenclature to give credit to any person. An author's name is attached to any plant for the simple purpose of identifying the plant name and we are also taught that the oldest name of any plant must stand. In order to meet these various requirements, botanists have been in the habit— erroneously, it now turns out — of employing two words to designate the plant, and this has been known as the binomial system of nomenclature. But now they are telling us that these two words do not constitute *the name* of the plant, but that *the name, per se*, is the second word of the two. In other words, *saccharinum* is the name of the sugar maple, *Canadensis* is the name of a Cornus—although one of my botanies declares that it is the name of a rush and even of a spruce!— and that *repens* is the name of white clover. This is the monomial system of nomenclature, and its devotees are delving through every author in the hope of finding *the name* of the plant. When this name is found—or supposed to be found, which amounts to the same thing —it is attached to some generic name to which it was never designed to fit, and the twain, to which an algebraic formula has been attached, is given to the world as the monomio-binomial name of the plant.

Now there is only one reason why I object to all this, and that is that it serves no purpose. It adds nothing to the stability of the name

but rather weakens it. In many cases we can hardly hope to find the oldest specific name which chanced to be applied to the plant, and we can seldom be sure that we have found it, while it is a comparatively easy and sure process to find the oldest binomial. I deny the proposition that the specific name is *the name*. It does not designate the plant and therefore fails to satisfy the first demand of a name. The binomial answers every requirement of the definition of a name, and it has the distinct advantage of dating from a definite point,—the work of Linnæus. But if we once begin to attach the oldest specific name to any genus whatever — as the fashion of the time may determine — there is no reason why we should stop our search for specific names with the time of Linnæus. In fact, some botanists are even now advising the use of names from the old herbalists, and the system, if logically prosecuted, must eventually include them. I cannot see one point in favor of the new system. It certainly weakens the permanence of nomenclature, for there is less reason to suppose that the mono-binomial is permanent than that the most recent binomial is. After fifty years or so of this upheaval we would be practically just where we are now, except that we should have added cumbersome formulas to nearly all our names. The new mongrel binomials would be subjected to just the same chances as those we now employ. We would have digged a hole for the extreme satisfaction of filling it up again.

The straits into which this new system often leads one are ludicrous. But I object to the untruthfulness of it, in many cases. Carex affords many examples. Tuckerman in 1843 designated a plant, which he took to be a form of *Carex scoparia*, as var. *moniliformis*, and another one thought to belong to *C. straminea* as var. *moniliformis*. Subsequently, Olney determinined that the latter is a distinct species and called it *Carex silicea*. Shall we now overturn the oldest specific name (silicea) — as is done in the Catalogue of Plants of New Jersey — and make an old varietal name a specific one? Shall we make Tuckerman say that he was mistaken and compel him, even indirectly, to raise his variety into a species? *Carex moniliformis* is not Tuckerman's. It is Britton's, and dates from 1889. Olney's name dates from 1868, and I see no other way than to make Britton's name a synonym of Olney's, as we have always done with recent names for all species. And if the var. *moniliformis* of *C. scoparia* should be erected into a species—what then?

They tell me that if botanists had always followed the methods of zoologists, using the oldest specific name in whatever genus, we should have been all right now. But as we did not start in this way, I do not see the force of the statement.

One of the most mischievous features of the whole thing is the ease with which authors of local floras obtain a cheap notoriety by making new combinations—which will likely be changed by the next cataloguer — and the extent to which it fosters the notion that making a new name and differing from an authority are the chief ends of systematic botany.—L. H. Bailey, *Cornell University*.